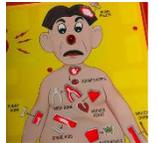
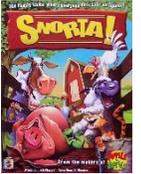


“The Beauty of Innocence”

Ephesians 5:3-14

October 30, 2016

Innocence is such a beautiful thing.¹ Several years ago, I was sitting at Dunn Brothers Coffee with my daughter Serena; she was 7 years old at the time. We were talking together while she was sipping on her hot cocoa and I drank my coffee. She said to me, “Daddy, do you want to play Snorta or Operation?” **Snorta** is a game where each person makes barn animal noises...out loud. As in, let me hear your cow or your chicken or your pig noise. Now for me, sitting in the public coffee shop, this just didn't seem like the best idea. So, I said that maybe we should try the other game: Operation. **Operation** is the game where you use this little set of tweezers to operate on the guy lying on the table; the mostly naked guy. I must admit, this also seemed more than a little awkward to me in a public place.



But for Serena, she was fine with either of these games. She was completely innocent. To her, these games weren't embarrassing or something to feel awkward about at all. The older I get, the more I've come to admire the beauty of innocence; even to envy it. It's unfortunate that part of growing up usually means losing some, if not most, of our innocence. But, it's one thing to lose our innocence about making pig noises in the coffee shop, and it's another thing to lose our innocence in our society as a whole.

In Ephesians 5:3-14, our Creator is calling His creation back to a place of innocence. He's calling us to live as Children of Light. The first thing to understand about being Children of Light is that God calls us out of darkness. If you are a Christ-follower, God has called YOU out of darkness. Ephesians 5:3-4 says, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.”

Christ-followers need to be aware of what's improper and out of place in the Christian life. This reminds me of a Calvin/Hobbes cartoon. They are reading the newspaper together and notice a movie listing with “adult situations.” They say that must mean things like paying taxes and taking responsibility. They agree this sounds awful and can't understand why these kinds of movies make any money. If only this was the kind of adult situation that vv. 3-4 were talking about.

v. 3 lists 3 things that are Improper:²

Sexual immorality: Sex outside of marriage

Any kind of impurity: a state of moral corruption or filthiness

Greed: insatiable desire for more and more

v. 4 lists 3 more things that are out of place:

Obscenity: Shameful or indecent behavior

Foolish talk: Saying something unwise and unbeneficial

Coarse joking: Risqué wit or vulgar speech



I want to invite each of us to do some self-evaluation. Not evaluating others, but just ourselves. As you look at the six different sins listed here, would you say that any of them are a regular part of your week? If you were to ask your friends, family, or the people you work with or go to school with, what would they say? Would they say that you view these things as improper? Would they say that they are careful not to bring these things up around you because you view them as inappropriate and out of place?

Or, would they say something else? Would they say that you actually enjoy a dirty joke now and then? In fact, maybe you even tell a “good” one now and then. Would those around you respond that sexual immorality and impurity don't really even seem to bother you. Or, that your conversation and

¹ Romans 16:19b, “...I want you to be wise about what is good, and **innocent** about what is evil.” Matthew 10:16, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as **innocent** as doves.”

² Definitions consulted with both Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 769). New York: United Bible Societies and with Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 34). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

conduct are really not all that different from the non-Christians they know. Now, I'm not suggesting that Christ-followers need to come across as prudish "holier than thous" or a bunch of "haters." But, God's Word is pretty clear this morning: "among you there MUST NOT BE even a hint!"

Christ-followers have been called out of darkness. As a Child of Light, we should come across as someone who values holiness and purity. All of the people around us should know that about us. It's a key part of our testimony and witness before the world. God has called us out of this junk. So, if any of it is still around or if it's creeping back into your life, get rid of any hint of it! You might need to pile up the old magazines and have a bonfire. You might need to get out your sledgehammer and smash some things to bits. Repent and get rid of any hint of these things!

Ephesians 5:5-7 goes on to say, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them." So, we have here a warning to guard against Deceivers who call us back into darkness. Rather than respecting the fact that we are Children of Light, they choose to tempt us away. They challenge our allegiance to following Christ by deceiving us with empty words. They offer us idolatry in place of our inheritance: idolatry that would gain the whole world for a short time, in place of the inheritance of our eternity in heaven.

Now, sometimes the intent of these deceivers may be malicious and mean, but more often I think it's motivated by a simple lack of understanding. Why would we forsake the pleasures of sin? Why resist temptation? Who really does that? People who are not yet following Christ may not understand that God is not saying sex is bad. Rather, God wants us to know that sex, in the wrong context, is immoral; it's against His good design. God's design is that the purity and pleasure of sex be enjoyed within the context of a committed marriage relationship between one man and one woman. God is not a buzzkill. As our Creator, HE knows what is best for us sexually.

In these verses, God is calling us to more than just sexual purity though. He's calling us to purity of every kind. Purity in our thoughts, motives, and actions. Purity from greed that could lead us to chase after the things of this world rather than the things of God. This is why v. 5 warns about idolatry. Idolatry of any kind robs us away from a relationship with the one true God of this universe. It takes us away from the God who loves us immensely and has wonderful things to teach us and show us.

These Deceivers find Christ-followers strange though. 1 Peter 4:4 explains it this way, "They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you." I was listening to a radio program a while back. They were talking about statistics on STDs and pregnancy among teens in the U.S. One of the speakers cracked a joke about the supposed benefits of teaching abstinence in the public schools.

The uproar of laughter was instantaneous, and loud. The following commentary was filled with assumptions, that every teen was out there having sex, whether their parents knew it or not. And, that it was soooo naïve of any adult to think that a campaign for abstinence would have any positive affect on lowering STDs or teen pregnancy rates.

But there is another point of view. Campaigns like "Virginity Rocks," celebrate abstinence as a good option. The back of their t-shirt says, "I'm loving my husband and I haven't even met him!" There are many powerful advantages to saving sex until marriage. These are all part of God's good design for sex. Unfortunately, much of our media today mocks purity and the beautiful innocence that God intends. If we are not careful as Christ-followers, we can find ourselves becoming desensitized and deceived by these empty³ words. Ephesians 5:7 warns us, "Therefore do not be partners with them."⁴ They will drag you down. And oftentimes, they aren't even subtle about it. They are shameless. They are like those in Rom. 1:32: "Although they



³ "Empty" is defined as "being devoid of intellectual, moral, or spiritual value" by Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 539). University of Chicago Press.

⁴ See 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"

know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

Here's something I love about God though; He is a God of grace. He is patient with anyone who is not yet following Christ. Even though Ephesians 5:6 tells us that God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient, we also know that God is patient... God does not want anyone to perish in his or her sin, but everyone to begin a relationship with Him.⁵

If you are not yet a Christ-follower, God is calling you out of darkness today. This begins by understanding God's great love for you. But you must also understand that Ephesians 5:6 teaches us that, "God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient." God's wrath is real. But you can be spared from His wrath. Today, you could choose to turn from your sin and to trust Christ for your salvation. You could pray something like this:

Dear God, thank You for showing Your love by sending Jesus to die on the cross for my sin. I admit that I have sinned. I haven't lived the way that You want me to. I believe that Jesus died to pay the price for my sins. He has made a way for me to get right with You. Today, I choose to turn away from my sin and to embrace Jesus as my Savior. From this day forward, I choose to follow Jesus as the Lord of my life. Amen.

This prayer is not a magic incantation. But, it is an example of a way that we can call out to God to rescue us from darkness. Why not turn to God today? Why not pray this prayer? God is certainly loving and gracious; but do not make the mistake of thinking He is a pushover. He is not soft on sin. We must take sin seriously. In fact, God takes our sin so seriously that He sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to pay the ultimate price, by dying to purchase our salvation.

If you prayed this prayer or if you'd just like to talk with someone more about it, please don't put this off. Get a hold of someone today who can help you and encourage you in your faith.

Our text this morning helps us to understand one other thing about being Children of Light: Children of Light are in the world to shine! Ephesians 5:8 reminds us, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."⁶ I want you to do something. Turn off the lights in the room or find a dark corner. Then, think about this: this is what you once were, darkness. Sit there for about 10 seconds. Then, turn on the lights and consider this: you are light in the Lord!



Note that v. 8 doesn't say that we once lived **in** darkness and now we live **in** the light. But rather, it says we **were** once darkness. And now, we **are** light. There's an important nuance here. When we become a Christ-follower, our outside surroundings don't change but our inside person does.

"In the Lord," our essence has changed; we become light. Our union with Christ caused a radical transformation in us from darkness, to light.⁷

Ephesians 5:9-10 goes on to explain: "(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord." This is just what our world needs today: goodness, righteousness, and truth. It needs Christ-followers to fully live out their faith in ways that please the Lord.⁸ Sometimes we look to things like better education, better health care, or better politics to make our world better. But none of these are nearly as important to our world as better Christ-followers. The Church is the light of the world!

Christ shines on us so that we can become the light of the world. Instead of being corrupted by the darkness that surrounds us, Christ-followers are called to exert our influence on our world.⁹ We light our world through our efforts right in our church building. Our ministry to children through Baypoint, Children's Church, and Nursery are designed to help our little ones understand the light of Christ. So are our Wednesday night youth and children's ministries, which reach our own children as well as those in the community. Our Sunday Morning Adult Small

⁵ See 2 Peter 3:3-9.

⁶ See Ephesians 2:1-10.

⁷ O'Brien, Peter T., *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 367.

⁸ See Ephesians 5:2

⁹ O'Brien, p. 377.

Groups, Section Groups, and Sunday School classes also show people the light of God's goodness. This past Friday our 55+ group enjoyed a nice meal and listened to some Christian music. In December, we'll enjoy the Women's Christmas Tea and the Men's Wild Game Feed. Both of these illustrate how our church is living out its mission to be a spiritual lighthouse in our community.

We also light our world through our efforts out in our community and world. We support the local Food shelf and various camps like Shamineau, Deeper Life, and Camp Oak Hills. We send shoe boxes all over the world through Operation Christmas Child. We have opportunity all week long to be a light at our jobs, in our schools, and in our neighborhoods. We support our Global Partners through prayer, finances, and encouragement. We praise God for their activity in bring the light of the Gospel all around the world. And, some of us are able to go out on short term mission trips and be the light in those ways.

And the list goes on. V. 10 tells us to "find out what pleases the Lord." And then, we need to do it. There is a great video about "The Church" by Pastor J. John. It's available on You Tube where he talks about "How To Explain What You Do, When You're A Pastor:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6TGxKvSqH8>

The church is the light of the world! We must live as Children of Light! Brothers and Sisters in Christ: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."¹⁰

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on October 30, 2016 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:14-16